HSTA 501.01: Readings in Early American History

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Course Description, Goals, & Outcomes:
This graduate colloquium explores classic and recent scholarship in early American history. Key topics and themes this semester will include capitalism and labor; race, class, and gender; law, politics, and empire; and the meaning of freedom. The chief goals of the course are to expose students to 1.) major historiographical problems that have dominated the study of early America; 2.) a variety of methodological approaches; and 3.) new scholarly trends both topical and methodological. Students successfully completing this course will gain a solid foundation for further historical and historiographical investigation of early America. They will also cultivate fundamental professional skills, including the construction of professional book reviews; the formation of effective discussion questions; leading class discussions; independent presentation of secondary scholarship; and the creation of a historiographical essay.

Students serving as teaching assistants in the early American survey (HSTA101: American History I) should take this course. Doctoral students wishing to take a comprehensive field examination in Early American History (or another field) with Professor Volk must take this course. Doctoral or Masters students wishing to have Professor Volk on their dissertation or thesis committee also must take this course.

Course Requirements:
Completion of assigned readings, faithful attendance, and consistent, constructive, and courteous participation are absolutely essential to the success of our course. Failure to meet these most basic requirements will be detrimental to the quality of our discussions and to your grade in this course. More formally, students are required to do the following:

1. Craft **1000-word professional book reviews of the course’s main texts.** Students will write 5 out of a possible 11 reviews. Everyone must write a review for Weeks 3, 8, and 15. You will have a choice of the other two books you review. At least one student will write a review each week.

   - A book review should summarize and critically analyze the author’s main historical arguments, use of evidence, methodological approach, historiographical contribution, and conclusions. Readers of your review should be able to grasp the structure and content of the book as well as its significance and most important insights. The review should also raise new questions and suggest new avenues for historical inquiry and research based on your engagement with the text. Useful models can be found in the *William & Mary Quarterly*, the *Journal of the Early Republic*, and *Reviews in American History*.

2. **Post Discussion Questions.** Each week students are required to post five questions worthy of our discussion in class. These questions should raise a variety of debatable issues—analytical, interpretive, historiographical, methodological, pedagogical, etc.—that force us to wrestle with each week’s readings and deepen our comprehension of the historical and historiographical issues presented to us. These questions must do more than ask us to repeat or summarize the content or approach of a particular text. Ideally, at least three of your questions should tackle what in your assessment matters most in each set of readings (the
big questions; the largest stakes). Some of your questions might ask us to compare works between weeks. At
least one question should engage with each week’s articles/essays. In preparation for our discussions,
students are expected to consider their classmates’ questions thoroughly. Discussion questions should be
posted to the course’s MOODLE site each Tuesday by noon.

3. **Twice leading weekly discussion.** This might be done in pairs. Discussion leaders are required to read
their classmates’ discussion questions ahead of time and use them to structure class discussion. The goal of
the discussion leader is **not** to act as the expert or authority in a given week but rather to facilitate a lively
and wide-ranging discussion that touches on the manifold issues raised in the texts and by your classmates.
Our discussion should be rigorous, stimulating, and above all, enjoyable.

4. **Twice reading, presenting, and reviewing a “Recommended Text.”** Twice during the semester you
will read an additional book, present it in class, and craft a professional book review of it. Your presentation
should cogently summarize and assess the text’s themes, argument(s), sources, methodology, significance,
and contribution to the field(s). Please relate this outside book to our weekly readings and other course
readings. **Provide your classmates with a printed 1000-word review of the work.** Consult with the
instructor and the weekly discussion leaders to determine the best time during the class for your
presentation.

5. A **final essay** (10-12 pages) tackling a particular historiographical issue is required. The topic of your
paper will be determined in consultation with the instructor. Ideally, students will choose a topic that will
inform the research project they undertake in the spring graduate research seminar.

**Books Available for Purchase (at the UM Bookstore):**


**DSS:** If you have a documented learning disability, contact me so we can arrange accommodation.
**Plagiarism & Academic Honesty:**
It should go without saying that all the work you do in this course should be your own. Plagiarism, cheating, or any other instances of academic misconduct will result in a failing grade in this course. The academic dean will also be notified and offenses could result in expulsion. A full explanation of UM’s policies on academic honesty can be found at: [http://libguides.lib.umt.edu/plagiarism](http://libguides.lib.umt.edu/plagiarism). You are responsible for reading and understanding these policies. A failure to have done so will not be an acceptable excuse for any violation. If you have questions, please ask the instructor BEFORE turning in an assignment.

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**Course Schedule:**

**(8/27) Week I – Introductions; Contact, Conflict, & Environment in the “New World”**


**Recommended:**

**ASSIGNMENT:** Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon

**(9/3) Week II – Colonial Virginia, Race, & the American Paradox**


**Recommended:**

**ASSIGNMENT:** Complete Reading Guide for Morgan, *American Slavery* (Due in Class) Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
(9/10) Week III – New World Empires: Atlantic, Continental, and Beyond

Paul W. Mapp, The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763 (UNC, 2011)

Recommended:
Carla Gardina Pestana, Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World (UPenn, 2010)
Michael Jarvis, In the Eye of all Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783 (UNC, 2012)

Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
BOOK REVIEWS: ALL REVIEW (Due in Class)

*Thursday Class: (9/18) Week IV – Goods, Ideas, & the Politics of the American Revolution


Recommended:
Gary Nash, The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America (Penguin, 2005)

Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
BOOK REVIEWS: (Due in Class)

(9/24) Week V – American Revolution, American Empire
Eliga H. Gould, Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire (Harvard, 2012)


Recommended:

Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
BOOK REVIEWS: (Due in Class)
(10/1) Week VI – Labor, Market Capitalism, and Law in the Early American Republic


**Recommended:**

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** (Due in Class)

*(10/8) Week VII – Mid-Semester Break – *Attend Swanberg Lecture, Thursday, Oct. 8th*

*(10/15) Week VIII – Lives and Minds of the Early Republic*
Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (Vintage, 1999)


**Recommended:**
Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America’s Unburied Dead* (Chicago, 2010)

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** ALL REVIEW (Due in Class)

*(10/22) Week IX – Politics and Public Life in the Golden Age of American Democracy*

Mary Ryan, “Civil Society as Democratic Practice: North American Cities during the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (Spring, 1999), 559-584.

**Recommended:**

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** (Due in Class)
(10/29) Week X – Antebellum Slavery & Southern Market Revolutions


**Recommended:**

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** (Due in Class)

(11/5) Week XI – Abolitionists, the 19th-Century Atlantic, and the Coming of the Civil War


**Recommended:**
Thomas Bender, *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (California, 1992)

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** (Due in Class)

(11/12) Week XII – The Civil War, Gender, & Memory
Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Harvard, 2010)


**Recommended:**
Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (Knopf, 2007)

**Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon**
**BOOK REVIEWS:** (Due in Class)
(11/19) Week XIV – Western History & the Age of Emancipation
Stacey Smith, Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction (UNC, 2013)
Recommended:
Kate Masur, An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D.C. (UNC, 2011)
Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
BOOK REVIEWS: (Due in Class)

(11/26) Week XIII – NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday

(12/3) Week XV – Cultures of Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century America
Recommended:
Post 5 Discussion Questions to MOODLE by Tuesday at noon
BOOK REVIEWS: ALL REVIEW (Due in Class)

(12/10) Finals Week – No Class
Final Paper Due Saturday, 12/13 by 4PM – Submit by email: kyle.volk@umontana.edu